



Amendments to the minutes of the ninety-seventh meeting of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee held on 21 November 2013 at Natural Resources Wales, Tŷ Cambria, Newport Road, Cardiff

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Joint Nature Conservation Committee

Amendments to the minutes of the ninety-seventh meeting of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee held on 21 November 2013 at Natural Resources Wales, Tŷ Cambria, Newport Road, Cardiff

1. There are no amendments to the minutes of the ninety-seventh meeting of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee.

Unconfirmed minutes of the ninety-seventh meeting of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee held on Thursday 21 November 2013, at Natural Resources Wales, Tŷ Cambria, Newport Road, Cardiff

Present

Mr Archdale
Dr Bridgewater
Dr Brown
Mr Casement
Mr Christensen
Mr Duke
Professor Kaiser
Professor Matthews
Dr Walker
Judith Webb

In attendance

Ms Arkle (items 10-14)
Mr Blencowe (items 1-10)
Ms Davies
Dr Hill
Dr Gibson
Dr Goold
Dr McDonald
Mrs McQueen
Mr Rose
Mrs Stevenson
Mr Yeo

Apologies:

Members: Professor Hill, Mr Parry, Mr Thin

Attendees: Mr Jardine

1. Chairman's opening remarks

- 1.1. Dr Bridgewater welcomed everyone to the ninety-seventh meeting of the JNCC.
- 1.2. Dr Bridgewater thanked Natural Resources Wales (NRW) for hosting the meeting and NRW Chief Executive Dr Emyr Roberts for the previous evening's presentation on the work of NRW.
- 1.3. Dr Bridgewater welcomed Mr Blencowe from Defra's sponsorship team to the meeting, and noted Ms Arkle for Defra would also be attending later in the meeting.

2. Declaration of interests

- 2.1. Mr Duke declared his work as Director Europe and Research (the Environment Bank Ltd) and as Senior Visiting Research Associate, University of Oxford. This was not considered to present a conflict of interest for any items at this meeting.

3. Amendments to the minutes of the June 2013 meeting (JNCC 13 N03)

- 3.1 The minutes of the June 2013 meeting were agreed.

4. Matters arising (JNCC 13 N04)

- 4.1. There were no matters arising from the minutes of the June 2013 meeting.

- 4.2. The completion of the action points from the June 2013 meeting was noted by the Committee.

5. Chief Executive's report on topical issues (JNCC 13 D06)

- 5.1. Committee noted the issues raised in the paper.
- 5.2. Dr Bridgewater reported on his meeting with Alun Davies, the Welsh Minister for Natural Resources and Food. Mr Davies had outlined the Welsh Government's commitment to Natural Resources Wales and acknowledged the ongoing support of JNCC.
- 5.3. Dr Bridgewater reported on a meeting he and Mr Yeo attended with the Defra Minister for Natural Environment and Science, Lord de Mauley. The minister fully supports JNCC and recognises that JNCC provides Government with good evidence to support its policy-making.
- 5.4. Dr Bridgewater advised that George Eustice, Minister for Farming, Food and the Marine Environment, will be responsible for marine issues within Defra, although the precise division of ministerial duties has yet to be finalised.
- 5.5. Dr Brown advised of potential risks around Defra's Strategic Alignment Programme, recommending that JNCC contributes positively to the development of options where appropriate but ensures that JNCC's UK-wide remit is not compromised by activities with an English focus.
- 5.6. Mr Yeo advised that he will report back to Defra on Committee's concerns and will provide Committee with regular updates on Strategic Alignment. Mr Duke advised that the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) would monitor progress and raise any concerns with Committee.
- 5.7. Dr Bridgewater advised that Committee members from the country conservation bodies should alert their ministers if they have concerns around the Strategic Alignment proposition to ensure that JNCC's position is recognised and understood.
- 5.8. Professor Kaiser noted that the 'One Business' approach should enable the joining up of standards of evidence. Mr Yeo advised that any fundamental changes in the approach to evidence will be presented to Committee.
- 5.9. Dr Walker advised of concern within Scottish Natural Heritage that JNCC's marine surveillance work plan has been delayed. Mr Yeo noted this comment and assured Committee that he will endeavour to keep this work to schedule.
- 5.10. Mr Yeo advised that appointment was underway of a successor to Dr Bridgewater, whose term ends in May 2014.
- 5.11. Judith Webb advised of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee's (ARAC) concerns around the delays in appointing members of both the Joint Committee and the ARAC. Dr Bridgewater noted the concerns and advised that there is and should continue to be dialogue with Defra's sponsorship team on managing appointments and publicising vacancies.

- 5.12. Mr Rose advised that the comments from Defra on the revised guidelines for the selection of Sites of Special Scientific Interest were now being considered and following consultation with the lead author, the document will be published shortly.

Action points: Audit and Risk Assurance Committee to monitor progress on the Strategic Alignment programme and Mr Duke to raise any concerns with the Joint Committee.

Mr Yeo to report back to Defra on Committee's concerns around Strategic Alignment and to regularly update Committee on Strategic Alignment developments.

Mr Yeo to engage with Defra's sponsorship team on managing appointments and publicising vacancies on the Joint Committee.

6. JNCC evidence quality policy (JNCC 13 P15)

- 6.1. Mr Rose presented the paper that outlined the proposed JNCC evidence quality policy for full implementation from April 2014.
- 6.2. Dr Bridgewater noted that he welcomed the thorough approach to the policy and in particular the emphasis on risk-based decision making.
- 6.3. Dr Walker advised that Scottish Natural Heritage's Scientific Advisory Committee welcomed the approach and would offer support where appropriate.
- 6.4. Mr Christensen advised that Natural England has its own evidence quality standards.
- 6.5. Professor Matthews noted that a similar approach to evidence quality is being taken in Natural Resources Wales.
- 6.6. The following points were raised in discussion:
- i. a supporting programme of training should be considered for new JNCC staff;
 - ii. the policy would enable JNCC to share best practice with the wider science community;
 - iii. the policy is clear, concise and transparent;
 - iv. JNCC should consider implementing an ISO standard for evidence quality;
 - v. the policy will enhance JNCC's reputation;
 - vi. the policy doesn't address the issue of standardisation across the UK.
- 6.7. Mr Rose advised that implementation of the policy would include a training programme for new and existing staff and that relationships with the science community would be strengthened. Further work would be undertaken to

consider the points raised on risk assessment, UK standardisation of evidence and ISO standards.

- 6.8. Committee approved the JNCC evidence quality policy for full implementation from April 2014, delegating the approval of a compliance monitoring process to the Executive Management Board.
- 6.9. Committee approved the delegation of any changes required after the first year of implementation to the Executive Management Board.
- 6.10. Dr Bridgewater requested that any changes to the proposed policy should be reported to Committee.

Action Point: Executive Management Board to approve a compliance monitoring process to support JNCC's evidence quality policy.

7. Refreshing JNCC's surveillance and monitoring evidence role (JNCC 13 D07)

- 7.1. Mr Rose presented the paper that outlined the proposed future direction of JNCC's surveillance and monitoring work. Prior to the Committee meeting, the paper had been presented to the Chief Scientists' Group.
- 7.2. The following points were raised in discussion:
 - i. it is unclear how the proposed JNCC role fits with the role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs);
 - ii. volunteer recorders (citizen science) need to be engaged in this approach;
 - iii. there are tensions between declining budgets and statutory requirements;
 - iv. the links between biodiversity and ecosystem services are crucial;
 - v. marine surveillance requirements are not fully covered in the paper;
 - vi. JNCC's current surveillance and monitoring programmes are skewed towards iconic species such as birds and butterflies. There is an opportunity to go back to first principles and consider what information is needed to manage the environment effectively;
 - vii. JNCC should consider geodiversity evidence requirements;
 - viii. the strategy needs to focus on different scales – local, country and UK levels;
 - ix. there are opportunities for JNCC to demonstrate scientific leadership in this area (e.g. in relation to knowledge management) and to show innovation through use of new technologies;
 - x. communication of a new surveillance strategy may be challenging.

- 7.3. Dr Bridgewater advised that there are likely to be differences in how the country nature conservation bodies want to work due to their different roles and policy contexts.
- 7.4. The Committee endorsed the broad direction of JNCC's surveillance and monitoring work, subject to the comments in 7.2 above.

8. Advancing conservation science thinking on protected areas in the UK (JNCC 13 D08)

- 8.1. Mr Rose presented the paper that discussed advancing conservation science thinking on protected areas in the UK. Mr Rose advised that the paper had been discussed at the Chief Scientists' Group prior to the Committee meeting where a wide range of views had been expressed.
- 8.2. Mr Yeo advised that the paper had been sent to several environmental NGOs and comments had been received. These included:
 - i. some important evidence on the value of protected areas is missing from the paper;
 - ii. the paper suggests choices have to be made between protected areas and wider environment measures, rather than seeing these as complimentary approaches;
 - iii. the suggestion that there should be compromise between protected areas and other economic and social priorities is unwelcome.
- 8.3. The following points were made in discussion:
 - i. the different trends within Special Protection Areas are interesting. Further analysis might be helpful;
 - ii. future work should consider how protected areas contribute to wider nature conservation strategies;
 - iii. there are issues, such as natural succession, where the present system is not working well;
 - iv. designation is not an end in itself. Protected areas also need to be managed appropriately;
 - v. we should communicate the multiple benefits of protected areas;
 - vi. this work will be the first test of the new evidence quality policy;
 - vii. work in the marine environment to define coherent networks of protected areas and identify sites for mobile species could be applied to the terrestrial environment;
 - viii. we should engage with a wider range of stakeholders, including environmental NGOs, organisations concerned with land/sea management, and the academic community.

- 8.4. Dr Bridgewater proposed that a small working group be established to take the work forward. The group should be moderated by Mr Casement and membership should include representation from NGOs.
- 8.5. Dr Bridgewater advised that additional ideas for the way forward would be circulated to Committee.

Action point: Mr Casement to lead working group, including NGO representation, on future approach to protected areas.

9. In confidence (JNCC 13 P16)

10. In confidence (JNCC 13 P17)

11. In confidence (JNCC 13 P18)

12. Changes to governance arrangements (JNCC 13 P19)

- 12.1. Mrs McQueen presented the paper which detailed amendments to governance arrangements to implement the changes agreed at the June 2013 meeting of the Joint Committee.
- 12.2. The following points were made in discussion:
 - i. the items reserved for Committee in the Schedule of Delegations should be revised to state that Committee recommend to government offshore Natura 2000 sites and MPAs designated under national legislation, not approve them;
 - ii. the role of the Chief Scientists' Group in advising Committee should be reflected in the Schedule of Delegations;
 - iii. consideration should be given to increasing flexibility around who represents country conservation bodies on Committee sub-groups to enable the most appropriate individual to provide representation on a specific issue;
 - iv. the Chair of Committee should manage the quorum on a case-by-case basis to avoid an imbalance in independent and country nature conservation body representation;
 - v. Committee papers should be circulated earlier to ensure adequate scrutiny by members.
- 12.3. In relation to country conservation body representation on sub-groups, Mr Yeo noted that caution should be taken to maintain a distinction between executive and non-executive responsibilities.
- 12.4. Mr Yeo gave an assurance that, as far as possible, Committee papers would arrive ten days prior to future meetings.

- 12.5. Dr Bridgewater recommended that further thought should be given to the role of the Chief Scientists' Group and representation of country conservation bodies on Committee sub-groups. Proposals will be presented at the March 2014 Committee meeting.
- 12.6. The Committee endorsed the proposed changes to governance documentation and implementation of the new arrangements with immediate effect as follows:
- i. Part 1 of the Schedule of Delegations (delegations from the Joint Committee), with the amendment detailed in 12.2.i above;
 - ii. Terms of Reference for the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee;
 - iii. Standing Orders for the Joint Committee and JNCC Company Board;
 - iv. Accountability Statements for the Joint Committee.
- 12.7. Committee noted the proposed changes to the following governance documentation:
- i. Part 2 of the Schedule of Delegations and Annex A (delegations from the Chief Executive);
 - ii. Terms of Reference for the Executive Management Board.
- 12.8. Judith Webb advised that greater emphasis should be placed on succession planning for both Joint Committee and Audit and Risk Assurance Committee membership. Dr Bridgewater requested that the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee should discuss succession planning and feed back to Committee at the March 2014 meeting.
- 12.9. Committee endorsed the appointment of Tony Hams as an independent external member of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee for a total of three years on a year to year expenses only basis. Dr Bridgewater noted the contribution of Mr Bryan Riddleston over a long period to the ARAC, and Committee endorsed that a letter of thanks be sent to Mr Riddleston.

Action points: Support company staff to address issues raised in relation to the Chief Scientists' Group and representation of country conservation bodies on Committee sub-groups, for discussion by Committee in March 2014. Audit and Risk Assurance Committee to feedback on succession planning discussion at March 2014 Committee meeting.

13. Progress against the Triennial Review implementation plan (JNCC 13 D09)

- 13.1. Committee noted progress against JNCC's Triennial Review implementation plan. The following comments were raised in discussion:
- i. progress to date is positive, with all actions on track for delivery;

- ii. the structured approach to managing relationships with key stakeholders is appropriate. Details should be circulated to Committee members to ensure a coherent approach;
- iii. greater emphasis should be placed on the role of the Chief Scientists' Group as a key driver for JNCC's work;
- iv. Committee will pay particular attention to the actions with an amber status, providing additional support as required to ensure delivery remains on track.

Action Point: Mr Yeo to circulate information on key stakeholders to Committee members.

14. Any other business

- 14.1. The appointments to the Joint Committee of Mr Casement, Mr Thin and Mr Christensen come to an end before the March 2014 meeting. Dr Bridgewater thanked them for their contribution and support to Committee.